

The Road to Santiago Leads to Melk Abbey

Inauguration/ The world renowned author Paulo Coelho along with the head of the provincial government Erwin Pröll inaugurate the first stage of the pilgrimage road.

"The first symptom indicating that we are killing our dreams is that we never have time. The busiest people that I have met in my life were at the same time the ones who always had time for everything." (Paulo Coelho)

Everyone must take the time if they want to pilgrimage the Austrian stretch of the Road to Santiago. The stretch will in future lead from the Hainburger Gate along the Danube and finally all the way to Vorarlberg. The first stage of the pilgrimage trail from Göttweig Abbey to Melk Abbey was inaugurated festively last week. The trail is 44 km long, well signposted, leads through the large Dunkelstein forest and can be completed in a day's march.

Paulo Coelho at Melk Abbey

Melk Abbey belongs to the major stations of the historic Road to Santiago that leads to the tomb of Apostle James in Santiago de Compostela. The Spanish part of the pilgrimage road experienced a renaissance through the novel "The Pilgrimage" by the Brazilian bestselling author Paulo Coelho. Since then hundreds of thousands of people embark on this spiritual march every year.

Paulo Coelho also came last week to Lower Austria to inaugurate the stretch from Göttweig Abbey to Melk Abbey along with the head of the provincial government Erwin Pröll. The initiative to revive the Austrian part of the pilgrimage road was taken by the Waldzell Institute, which has dedicated itself to the theme of a "meaningful life."

The head of the provincial government Erwin Pröll on the pilgrimage road in Lower Austria: "An ancient road shall lead us to new paths. The belief that money and material values alone are not fulfilling is increasingly prevailing. The heightened devotion to spirituality is therefore the logical consequence."

On the occasion of the inauguration of the pilgrimage trail, the author Paulo Coelho spent an entire day in Melk. He was both inspired and smitten by the library of the abbey. His lifework was also included in the Waldzell Collection there. In the evening he joined a reading by Karlheinz Hackl from his book on the Road to Santiago, before he discussed man's search of his destiny with the audience.

The Road to Santiago

Since the early Medieval Times the journey to the Spanish Santiago de Compostela is among the largest pilgrimages of occidental Christianity.

Already millions of people have traveled this road in the past centuries carrying the sign of the St. James' scallop-shell, to get to the tomb of Saint James. In 1987 the European Council declared the historically traveled Road to Santiago from the Pyrenees to Santiago de Compostela in Spain (780 km long) as the first European Cultural Road. From Vienna to Santiago it is 3200 km.